

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 38

BRIGHT DAYS

A short lived story paper edited by Edward Stratemeyer. 31 issues April 1896 to February 27, 1897. Sold for 5c each. Profusely illustrated in black and white. First few issues sported a colored border on the cover. Publisher is given as Bright Days Publishing Co., 21 and 23 Ann St., New York, N. Y. For a listing of all stories see Bibliographic Listing No. 8, available from the publisher for 50c.

Author and Artist of the Street & Smith Staff

By J. Edward Leithead

PART I

The Author: W. Bert Foster

"A scant half-hundred riders, round-shouldered with fatigue, in faded blue uniforms, the yellow stripes down their trouser legs more than anything else declaring them Uncle Sam's cavalry, were riding along the trail toward the descent into the gulch . . .

"You know this gorge, Cody?" queried Captain Caverly of the handsome scout, who rode a better charger than even his own mount.

"I've been through it once, Cap," was the reply as the speaker removed his military hat and allowed the morning breeze to fan his bronzed forehead.

"His hair hung upon the collar of his hunting-coat. His eyes were keen and unswerving in their glance. He knew the West—even this wilderness—as few white men ever knew it."

The above is an extract from Buffalo Bill Stories No. 353, Buffalo Bill and the Bronco Buster, or, The Raid of Wolf Fang, published by Street & Smith, February 15, 1908 (cover picture by the well-known artist, Charles L. Wrenn). When I first read these words in the long ago, you may be sure I hadn't the remotest notion of ever knowing the man who wrote them. But meet him I did, years afterward in his New York apartment, when I was writing professionally myself.

Both of us were doing stories for the Clayton group of magazines, the trade mark of which was a triangle, one side formed by Ace-High Magazine, another by Ranch Romances and the third by Cowboy Stories. Compared to Foster, though he wasn't really old—only something over sixty when he died—I was practically a youngster, twenty-seven, and hadn't had too much writing experience yet. Foster, reading the shorts I first submitted to Ace-High, told the editor he'd like to see me the next time I came to town.

That meeting was more momentous than I could foresee; not only did the seasoned veteran, Bert Foster, say that he liked the stuff I was sending to the magazine but he happened to mention he had written much for Street & Smith. Memory did a flash-back to my dime novel reading days (not that I'd ever entirely forgotten them) and I asked if he'd done any of the nickel weeklies which, even in 1923, were more or less collectors' items.

"Yes," said Foster, "I did. Many of them, of many kinds."

"Any about Buffalo Bill?"

He smiled. "Quite a few. Yes."

Well, that was the beginning of our friendship. I didn't learn all I did about him in that one visit, of course. There was a hearty standing invitation for me to drop in whenever I was in New York.

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Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St., Fall River, Mass.

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Assistant Editor

Ralph F. Cummings, 161 Pleasant St., S. Grafton, Mass.

Asst. Ed. Photography—Charles Duprez, 228 Larch Lane, Smithtown, L.I., N.Y.

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A natural teller of tales if ever there was one, Foster at that time was making his name beloved by thousands of Ace-High readers with his cowboy characters, "Two-gun" Homer Stillson and "Poke" Fellows. The latter, as "Poke" Carew, first saw life as the bronco buster in Buffalo Bill Stories No. 353, and at least one other Buffalo Bill tale. Homer Stillson had a leaning toward poetry as well as a positive skill at six-gunners; his first name was really a nickname resulting from his frequent quoting of Omar Khayyam, "the tent-maker," Persian poet, mathematician and astronomer. (In this connection, I recall that one of the Homer serials was called "Homer, the Harness Mender"). He had a good fund of humor, a tolerance for humanity's failings and a sure aim, and he needed all three, for "Poke" Fellows, an inveterate poker player as his handle indicates—and not a lucky one—was a natural target for trouble and often in need of Homer's helping hand, although Poke could sure hold up his end and a little more when there was a bullet blizzard. It was no secret at Clayton publishing headquarters that the Homer Stillson-Poke Fellows series really had put Ace-High across with the Western fans.

Bert Foster was working on one of those serials on the occasion of my first visit. He used to write the first draft of a story in longhand (he could do a million words a year, too), resting the paper on a drawing board supported by the arms of his chair. As I was a longhand writer myself at the time, only later turning to pound 'em out on a typemill, I was much interested in this arrangement. His story was typed and he went over it again to make corrections and changes, if any, then a final copy was typed. In all this he was assisted by Myrtle Foster, his second wife.

While he worked he wore a green eyeshade. This last had a significance I could not know about until later, although I had noticed his very thick-lensed spectacles. He was a big-boned, rather heavy man, sparse of hair, clean-shaven. He looked to be in good

trim, and he was—save for his eyes. For anyone to have poor sight is most unfortunate, and for a man who planned a career as a writer, using his eyes almost constantly, even more of a handicap and a hazard. Foster's eye trouble went back to his schooldays. It did not improve, with the strain he put upon them by the kind of close work he did all his life. Eventually blindness threatened—but that came later.

He had been a young newspaper editor, sold some short stories and had a book published, "The Heron's Nest," before he showed up in New York to write for Frank Munsey's *Argosy* Magazine. His stories proved so popular that he had a serial running nearly all the time, with a novel or short story in each issue. He used seven pseudonyms there, but I know only two of them, "Jared L. Fuller" and "John Boyd Clark." Much, much later, stories of his in *Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine* appeared under the pseud. "Jared L. Fuller", and he used "John Boyd Clark" in *Ace-High* when he had a story in the same issue over his own name.

Going back to the early days, he kept busy writing, married; and then his first wife became an invalid. He moved to the country, nursed his wife and ran the house, yet never missed a story deadline—and kept this up for many years. There was no cure for his wife and he stayed faithfully by her until the end, though it was a long and heartbreaking ordeal.

It seems there always was a market for Bert Foster's stories (so few of which appeared over his own name that not many readers ever saw the by-line, W. Bert Foster), and one reason he never lacked a market—not for long, at any rate—was that he could write in almost any vein, and was a painstaking, careful craftsman. His second wife, who was Myrtle Juliette Corey and learned from him the fine points of writing until her stories, particularly Western love stories, were much in demand with the pulps, once said, "I marvel that he could drop into so happy a style in writing for

girls and the very juvenile tastes."

Foster wrote the first ten of the "Cornerhouse Girls" series, and started the "Ruth Fielding" series, doing a dozen or more of these. "Caroline of the Corners" and "Caroline of the Sunny Heart" were books published by Dodd, Mead under a nom. and made into a feature movie starring Bessie Love (she was once feminine lead with William S. Hart in a Western movie, "The Aryan"). "Belinda of the Red Cross" was another which saw book publication.

But Foster authored far more boys' books than those for girls. For Donohue of Chicago he started the Oriole Series and the Sea to Sea Series. The pseudonyms he used for hard-cover books for boys and girls were: "Amy Bell Marlowe," "Alice B. Emerson," "Grace Brooks Hills," "Jared L. Fuller," "John Boyd Clark," "Ruth Be-more Endicott" and "Louis Arunde." The Penn Publishing Co. brought out a number of historical books for boys under Foster's own name: "The Eve of War" (The Civil War), "With Ethan Allen at Ticonderoga" and "With Washington at Valley Forge" (the Revolutionary War, of course), "In Alaskan Waters," and some other northern books for boys of which I haven't the titles. He used the nom. "Bertram Leghar" for the "Camera Chap" series in Top Notch Magazine, "Snapshot Artillery," etc., which were reprinted in New Medal Library. His Cape Cod stories for an adult audience were published under nom. of "James A. Cuper," the titles being "Sheila of Big Wreck Cove," "Cap'n Jonah's Fortune," "Cap'n Abe, Storekeeper" and "Tobias of the Light." Two of these were filmed.

Under his own name were published these hard-cover books, "The Man from Tall Timber," "Six to Six" and "Findings is Keepings," the latter two being old mystery serials from Munsey's and brought out by Clode just before Foster's death. He contributed to just about all the Sunday-school papers published; yet the same man had stories in Collier's Weekly, Cosmopolitan, Munsey's, etc., whether over his own

name or not I don't know. He didn't do badly with his movie rights, either, for besides the 3 I've mentioned, 12 of his Ace-High and Ranch Romances novels were done in motion pictures.

It has been asked whether Bert Foster ever was connected with the Edward Stratemeyer Syndicate. Stratemeyer was one of the most prolific writers of juveniles of all time, using a great many pseudonyms, possibly the best-known being "Arthur M. Winfield," attached to the excellent and justly famous "Rover Boys" series (1 also liked his 6 volume Colonial Series, "With Washington in the West," "Trail and Trading Post," "At the Fall of Montreal," etc.). Stratemeyer wrote for Munsey's (just as Foster did and at about the same time), and then became editor of Street & Smith's "Good News" under the pseudonym "W. B. Lawson."

In a letter to Ralph Smith, dated May 25, 1925, Bert Foster says, in part, "... However, the nom. 'W. B. Lawson,' as I remember, was an editorial nom. owned by the firm of Street & Smith, and several people wrote stuff for that name, as well, I believe, as editing the old GOOD NEWS under that fictitious title. The only editor of GOOD NEWS whom I ever knew was Mr. Edward Stratemeyer, author of the 'Dave Porter' and 'Rover Boys' stories . . ."

Foster doesn't say that he wrote for "Good News," and I couldn't find his name in Captain Mayo's Bibliographic Listing of Good News; but Foster does state that he knew Stratemeyer. It is a fact that Foster did write for Golden Days (James Elver-son).

Edward C. Stratemeyer established his Literary Syndicate in New York in 1906. His method of working, I believe, was to supply his writers—of juvenile or youthful fiction—with plots which they were to expand into book-lengths, very often in a series. He maintained an office on Madison Avenue, N. Y.—from the 20's—maybe even earlier—until possibly the year of his death, 1930, but definitely till 1928.

Now, Foster, mentioning Stratemeyer in his letter to Ralph Smith, doesn't mention he ever wrote for the Stratemeyer Syndicate, and you'd think he would if he had written for it. It was in 1906 that Foster became a regular on the Street & Smith writing staff and made his first contribution to the Buffalo Bill Stories, which was only a beginning. Foster COULD have handled work for the Syndicate at first when just starting to write for S. & S., but he couldn't have kept it up after he was supplying the bulk of the Buffalo Bill Stories and writing also for New Nick Carter Weekly, New Magnet Library (Harrison Keith stories), Diamond Dick, Jr., Rough Rider and Bowery Boy. And whether he wrote for "Good News" and the Stratemeyer Syndicate or not, neither he nor Mrs. Foster ever mentioned it to me. I would remember if they had. In fact, I'd have made a note of it.

I wish that Bert Foster were here to know that his record writing of 136 of the best Buffalo Bill Stories finally went into a biography of Buffalo Bill, the definitive biography, "The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill" by Don Russell (I hope a lot of you fellows got that book—Ed LeBlanc did and said it was every bit as great a book as I had claimed in my DNR review). For the Foster record, I'm listing those 136 frontier tales:

The Buffalo Bill Stories Nos. 282, 283, 292, 293, 294, 295, 300, 301, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506.

He made the following contribution to the Nick Carter saga, giving Fred

Dey and Fred Davis a breathing-spell now and then:

New Nick Carter Weekly Nos. 565, 566, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682.

Foster's first two Nick Carters, Nos. 565, *Secrets of a Haunted House*, and 566, *A Mystery in India Ink*, were two parts of a trilogy, but evidently he was switched to another writing job before he could finish the third one, No. 567, *The Plot of the Stantons*, which was written by Fred Dey. However, Foster showed up again in a run of tales, 616 through 621, another run, 648 through 653, and so on. And here's how he wrote them—quotation from No. 619, *Down to the Grave*, or, *Nick Carter Buried Alive*:

"Success had perched upon Nick Carter's banner for many a long day. Now, failure seemed suddenly to blight his work.

"The attempt of Addison to gain a big slice of old man Brent's wealth was indeed balked. For Nick had the house of the seer of second sight raided, he found two crooks besides the man he had seen in Troy pen, all posing as servants, and, although the girl disappeared, Addison himself spent a night behind bars at headquarters.

"But Addison had money and money bought good legal talent. The police could find out absolutely nothing about him. They had to let him go, only they warned him that he must give up the second-sight business as a money-making game."

In No. 666, *Nick Carter's Master Struggle*—one of a series of three, the others being 665 and 667—Foster describes Nick's battle with an orang-outang in the basement of a New York dwelling, which is a little masterpiece of suspense. Another series, No. 674 through 676, begins in Honduras, Central America, and winds up in New Orleans, La., during the Mardi Gras. The cover illustration of 676, *Behind the Mask*, shows a colorful parade of the merry-makers (the artist was F. A. Carter—no relation to Nick!). Besides these, Foster told me that he

and Frederick Davis wrote most of the Harrison Keith stories for New Magnet. Two of Foster's were No. 593, Harrison Keith's Battle of Nerve (where a criminal was traced because he bought a bag of candy for the girl he was holding prisoner, not being the sweet-eating type himself or so Keith reasoned), and No. 611, Harrison Keith's Mummy Mystery. Another of Foster's was 663, Nick Carter's Convict Client, originally a Harrison Keith but changed to a Nick Carter before publication because the Keith series hadn't caught on as it should (the stories were really very good, look who wrote them). When this paperback came out, Keith's name appeared once where the proof-reader had slipped up in changing it over to a Nick Carter tale. Of course, this wasn't Foster's fault. He hadn't seen the mss. since he had sent it in as another title in the Harrison Keith series.

(to be continued)

NEWSY NEWS

By Ralph F. Cummings

161 Pleasant St., So. Grafton, Mass.

Sam Cousley of Englewood, N. J., loves to collect old nickel novels, as well as other items, Historic Americana and unusual human interest memorabilia, from old buttons to marching helmets, scarves, relics of presidential campaigns, ballots, inaugural programs and what not. He has many displays of all kinds of things of the days of old. He likes old pictures of baseball stuff, real old pictures back to 1860s, 70s, and 80s, as well as old baseball guides. He is also looking for a tinder box, steels and flints. Also old crystal radio sets, old mikes, etc.

Col. Charles D. Randolph of Davenport, Iowa, hasn't far to go in completing his set of the Buffalo Bill Stories. He has had to fill in some with New Buffalo Bill Weeklies. Charlie loves anything on Buffalo Bill and his pards.

Guess the Wayside Press gave up the idea of republishing a lot of the old Alger books and others, not enough

subscribers I understand. Too bad, as

Back numbers Reckless Ralph's Dime Novel Roundup, Nos. 1 to 237 for sale. Some reprints, all interesting, 12 for \$1.00 or all 237 numbers for \$18.00 postpaid.

Ralph F. Cummings

161 Pleasant St., So. Grafton, Mass.

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1508-6th Ave., S. W., Ardmore, Okla.

I'm sure it would of been wonderful to bring out those old timers, back before the public again.

Ed McNabb of Brooklyn, N. Y., loves to collect the old story papers of long ago, also pictures of them.

Bill McCafferty still likes most any thing on the old west. He likes sand from famous places, as well as old time nickel novels and story papers, old buttons, pictures, medals, etc. Bill

was very sick a while back, but is better now.

I understand Marion Harland wrote 20 or so books. Then she married a minister, and it was out of her struggles that she wrote "Common Sense" in the old "Household Mag." in 1871. She then wrote books on Home Economics and travel. Albert Terhune Payson is believed to of been her son. He wrote the Collie Books.

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COLLECTORS SHOULD READ THIS

- New England Palladium (Semi-weekly Boston newspaper for 1813) 105 numbers. Bound. Covers detached. \$35.00.
- Boys of New York. Young Men of America. Girls and Boys of America. Leslie's Boys and Girls Weekly (large size). Young Sports. Argosy. Boys Champion. Leslie's Young American. Golden Hours. Happy Days. Some FAIR copies at 3 for \$1.00. Ask for rates on good copies.
- Saturday Evening Post. July 25, 1874 to Jan. 27, 1877. 132 consecutive, nice shape. Serials by Mayne Reid, Prentice Ingraham, Buffalo Bill, and others. \$25.00 for the lot. Will break at either end, 50 copies for \$10.00.
- Pluck and Luck (large size). 10 below #950 for \$10.00.
- Champion Library (1887-1889) \$2.50 each. (3 fair for \$3.00).
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- BOUND VOLUME contains 39 Wide Awake Library, between #45 and 690. \$35.00.
- Dime Western Magazine (Pulp). 30 different, \$10.00.
- Peterson Novels (About 1875). 5 novels by George Reynolds, \$10.
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- Log Cabin Library. 5 good numbers, \$10.00.
- Hogarth House Novels: Jack Harkaway in America, good. Jack Harkaway After Schooldays, no covers. Both for \$1.50. Young Hopeful's Schooldays. 208 pp. 2 color plates. \$1.50. Tom Darling; or, Far From Home. Shaken. \$1.00.
- King of Diamonds, \$1.50. The Spies of the School, \$1.50.
- Boys of the British Empire (1883) #70 to 89, loose, \$2.00.
- Young Men of Great Britain. Monthly parts (4 or 5 issues in each part). 5 monthly parts, \$2.00.
- Our Boys Journal. Vol. 10. Bound in card. (1881) #231-265. \$3.00.
- Boys and Girls (Raynor). #1 to 16, loose, \$2.00.
- London Journal. #1000 to 1969 (1865). \$5.00. Bound.
- Chums. Vol. 15. Bound. 1907. 52 numbers. \$7.50.
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- Young Ladies of Great Britain. Vol. 4 (1872) #112-156. Bound. \$5.
- Postpaid. Subject to prior sale.

RALPH P. SMITH

Box 985

Lawrence, Mass.